



## Olivier Triumphant

LONDON.  
**O**NE DIFFICULTY with the task of creating a repertory company is that in order to attract and keep a large number of talented performers, it is essential that each has the opportunity to play several substantial roles. This means that a small-cast play is a luxury and cannot stay in the company's repertoire for long.

A cruel example of this is the National Theatre's current production of Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*. Because it contains the single most splendid performance in the illustrious four-year history of the organization, one would expect it to be maintained for several seasons. But because the performance is by Sir Laurence Olivier, director of the National Theatre, and because he puts the development of the organization he leads ahead of any personal acclaim his acting may receive, it will probably be dropped shortly to make way for new, larger-cast productions. Therefore a rush trip to London was obligatory.

Olivier's stark portrayal of a schizoid, aging Swedish Army Captain fighting to sustain his ferocity and arrogance with animal disregard for other people is, as it turns out, a superb and mysterious creation. Whereas one felt the same actor's celebrated Othello demonstrated how much he could do by working at it, his Captain reveals how much he can do by relaxing with it.

Although the island garrison where Part I of the play occurs is dour, Olivier's Captain begins quite cheerfully. He seems a husband eager to enjoy life's small pleasures and to joke away the larger negative aspects of his existence. When he talks merrily of getting in a supply of wine for their silver wedding anniversary, he lifts the miserable reality of an unhappy marriage into sardonic absurdity. Comic, too, is his irritable unwillingness to admit that his eyesight or his ability to do simple addition are weakening, and Olivier has found a wonderfully bravura way to pour himself a drink that is patently designed to conceal the Captain's incipient arthritis.

Beneath these amusing adjustments, however, Olivier lets simmer a subconscious fierceness which first shows itself in the way his head hangs forward like that of some fear-maddened beast determined to destroy unreasoningly anything weaker than he is, but willing to become subservient to a stronger force. Then we get a flash of this underlying dangerousness as he becomes momen-

tarily vehement in protesting that he has taken his wife *five* times to Copenhagen. A little later he almost explodes as the repressed thought of the possibility of living alone rises to the surface. Finally his wife, Alice, and her would-be lover, Kurt, get him to show off his virility by dancing to "The Entry of the Boyars," and Olivier lets us first see his pride-infected vigor in an absurdly elegant dance. But as he dances, the failure of his aging body causes fear to creep in and he topples over uncomprehendingly.

**F**ROM this point on, the Captain becomes an illogical animal no longer able to repress unpleasantness, but forced to face his fear of death. After the first fright has passed, Olivier lets the manic forces take over. He is wounded and dangerous as demoniacally he seeks out the sadistic-masochistic satisfactions of fighting with his wife. He senses that she and Kurt may ally against him, and he retaliates against them with full force. Olivier is at his best as he gloatingly announces that he is not going to die but is going to divorce his wife so that he can "change this unfortunate union for one that suits me better—in other words, unite my destiny with that of some woman who together with devotion to her husband may also bring into this household *youth* and, may I say, a little *BUU-TT-EEEE!*" In a frenzy of elation, he smashes his wife's picture, breaks whiskey bottles, dumps out everything on his desk, including his own spectacles, and mockingly licks a packet of old love letters.

After this eruption, there is a temporary calm as the Captain lapses back to sanity and appears oblivious of having



Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* at Britain's National Theatre—(l to r) Geraldine McEwan as Alice, Robert Stephens as Kurt, and Laurence Olivier as Edgar.

done what he has done. Now Olivier gently achieves a bit of comic relief as he explains how once he decided to push his wife into the water because "it occurred to me quite naturally, as she was standing on the pier, that she ought to go in."

But his wife returns to pick up their lifelong battle, and the first part of the play ends in his triumphant counterattack in which he irrepressibly fights his way back to desperately defiant laughter. If it were to end here—and the usual practice is for the first part to be done by itself—Olivier's performance would have left us with a full sympathy for the Captain.

Part II, however, insists that we follow the Captain's destiny to its conclusion. In it, Olivier rises with hilarious arrogance to the role of malevolent destroyer of the weaker Kurt and his own daughter Judith. With ridiculous hypocrisy, he pronounces blatant lies to give a righteous face to his underhanded stratagems. With amusingly measured calculation, he informs Kurt's son, who is in love with Judith, of his obligation to withdraw and let Judith marry the Captain's superior officer because that man's influence will make possible the continuation of the young man's education. By referring to his superior as "the col-o-nel," he makes each repetition of the extra-syllabic word become a pinpoint-accurate sword stroke.

**W**HILE his exercise of intentional evil now makes the Captain loathsome, it gives Olivier the opportunity to release himself fully into a hilarious kind of insanity which he makes most entertaining. But ultimately his greatness as an actor makes it possible for him to arrive at a shattering death scene in which the Captain manages to recapture us emotionally. After receiving the news that Judith has scotched his plans, he has a stroke, pitching forward to the floor. Then as he lies dying in a chair, tantalized by his wife's triumphant vituperation, he rouses himself to one final counterattack and spits in her face. It is a magnificently animal and strangely sexual act, the perfect end of the hell Strindberg has conjured up for two intensely mortal gladiators.

Director Glen Byam Shaw must be given credit for encouraging Olivier to give such a great performance, and if Geraldine McEwan as the wife and Robert Stephens as Kurt seem scarcely more than adequate, they at least do not hamper Olivier, who, at the age of sixty, seems to be entering a new prime period of his acting career.

—HENRY HEWES.

Answer to Wit Twister, page 29:  
panes, napes, aspen.

# BEYOND VIETNAM:

## SR / Research SCIENCE & HUMANITY



**D**URING a visit to Washington, D.C., late in May 1967, I was invited to lunch by one of the few persons who knows the grave problems that are heading for the desk of the President of the United States while the problems are still en route. "I think you might perform a major public service," my host suggested, "if you were to call public attention to the absence of planning by scientists for what lies beyond Vietnam."

He went on: "As you know, the federal government is far the biggest spender for science and technology. After steadily climbing for a decade, the science and technology budget has been on a rather level plateau for the last few years. Another escalation in spending can be expected after the Vietnam war ends. Economic and political plans will be ready for the peace before it comes. But science has no plans that I have ever heard of, and I think I would know about them if such existed."

Since my host was even more familiar than I was with the elaborate science advisory panel apparatus of the federal government, he clearly meant that imaginative ideas worthy of new financing were desperately needed and that they would have to be fought for if they were to prevail against entrenched

lines of thinking and often wasteful experimenting, sometimes more concerned about flashy publicity than about worthwhile consequences.

Back home in New York, I began a mental culling of the letters I had received and the talks I had had recently that lay outside the established scientific ruts. During this process I read in *The New York Times* a dispatch written by James Reston, a *Times* associate editor equipped with one of the sharpest pairs of ears and one of the keenest minds in journalism. The dispatch included the following paragraphs:

Official Washington, in its present subdued mood, is ready for . . . a new reappraisal of . . . problems and policies. . . . The Johnson Administration, in fact, is ready for even more than this. It has seen the limitations of its own power in Vietnam. It has observed the failure of Moscow's expensive power moves in the Middle East. It is increasingly conscious of the need to divert military expenditures—now amounting to almost \$200 billion a year in the world—to . . . constructive purposes. . . .

In short, the United States Government, startled by the dangers of the wars in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, is now in a mood to think beyond Vietnam. . . .

Those lines reminded me of others I had read earlier in a paper prepared by William D. Carey, executive assistant director of the U. S. Budget Bureau, for a symposium sponsored by the CIBA Foundation and the Science of Science Foundation in London, England, last April. Mr. Carey wrote:

The American policy-making system has developed extensively during the last two decades, largely in response to urgent dynamics in the national economy and in our external relations. There are many faces to this evolution, but few are as interesting—or perplexing—as the process through which science and public policy have achieved a relationship which can be described either as a marriage or as a form of coexistence, depending on one's bias.

It is clear that science occupies a conspicuous place in national policy-making. . . . And the reasons are impressive: Science provides new and fast routes to economic growth, international bridge-building, national defense, technological advance, and such human values as overcoming want and disease. . . .

In 1940 the national government spent about \$75,000,000 on research and development. By 1953 it found itself spending \$2 billion a year, and in the budget for fiscal year 1968 the figure stands at about \$17 billion. Not